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ABSTRACT

Results of a survey assessing public opinions and attitudes about higher education in Alabama are presented. A representative sample of 736 households was contacted by telephone, and 546 agreed to be interviewed. The survey was designed to evaluate public opinions and attitudes about higher education teaching, research, service, finance, governance, and quality of performance. Among the findings are the following: 94 percent expressed confidence in Alabama colleges and universities; 76 percent indicated that Alabama colleges and universities are as good as those in the rest of the nation; 94 percent indicated that a college education is important for their children; 90 percent agreed that is is important for Alabama's colleges and universities to conduct research that relates to the problems of the South and the nation; 89 percent felt it important for Alabama's colleges and universities to provide direct technical assistance to the local community and the state government; 58 percent indicated that they would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to improve the quality of education in Alabama higher education; 61 percent opposed using state tax money to support private colleges in Alabama; and 53 percent felt that a Board of Regents rather than the state legislature should decide how much money each college and university in Alabama gets every year. A brochure describing the study is appended. (SW)

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Institute of Higher Education
Research and Services

January 28, 1981

THE CITIZENS' VIEWPOINT
HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALABAMA 1981

Attached you will find the results of an opinion survey conducted by the Institute of Higher Education Research and Services (IHERS) at The University of Alabama, December 10-19, 1980 assessing public opinions and attitudes about higher education in Alabama. The telephone poll was conducted on behalf of the Institute by the Capstone Poll, a telephone survey facility under the direction of the Center for Administrative and Policy Studies and the School of Communication at The University of Alabama. This survey represents the third opinion inquiry on higher education conducted by IHERS within the past five years.

The study was conducted to survey a representative sample of Alabamians (age 18 and older) to determine their perceptions of higher education. It was designed to evaluate public opinions and attitudes about several areas of higher education, including teaching, research, service, finance, governance, and quality of performance.

For this survey, a total of 736 households were contacted by telephone for interview. Appropriate sampling techniques were employed within households to assure a random, and, indeed, representative sample of adult Alabamians. Of the total households contacted, 168 individuals declined to be interviewed and an additional 22 persons did not complete the telephone survey, yielding a total of 546 completed interviews. Data analysis was based on this number.

All numbers are given in percentages, unless otherwise noted. DK (don't know) and/or NA (no answer) responses are also reported in percentages where applicable.

Should you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact me.

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THE CITIZENS' VIEWPOINT
HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALABAMA 1981

Q-1 First, I would like to ask you about several institutions in the state and nation. For each one please tell me if you feel a great deal of confidence, some confidence or no confidence.

VARIABLE	LABELS	GREAT DEAL	SOME	NO	DK/ NA
SCOURT	(a) U.S. Supreme Court	21.9	64.0	10.1	4.0
GOVERNOR	(b) Governor of Alabama	16.9	56.9	24.1	2.1
USUNIV	(c) U.S. Colleges and Universities	47.0	45.8	2.1	5.1
ALALEG	(d) Alabama Legislature	17.7	64.6	12.3	5.4
REAGAN	(e) President-elect Reagan	38.7	41.4	15.4	4.5
ALAUNIV	(f) Colleges and Universities in Alabama	51.1	43.3	2.9	2.6
NPAPERS	(g) Newspapers	20.2	61.7	16.6	1.5
JCOLLEGE	(h) Junior Colleges	32.7	55.7	7.4	4.2
COMPANY	(i) Major Companies and corporations	19.4	60.4	12.7	7.5
AURURN	(j) Auburn University	45.7	42.8	5.2	6.3
TVNEWS	(k) T.V. News	33.6	57.5	8.2	.8
UALABAMA	(l) The University of Alabama	59.7	34.9	2.1	3.3

Q-2 Now, I would like to ask you a few questions about what you think colleges and universities in Alabama should be doing. Is it very important, important, not very important, or not at all important for colleges and universities in Alabama to do each of the following?

		VERY IMPOR-TANT	IM-POR-TANT	NOT VERY IMP.	NOT AT ALL IMP.	DK/ NA
SCHOLARS	(a) Produce well-trained scholars	69.0	27.4	2.4	0.0	1.2
TECHN	(b) Provide direct technical assistance to local communities and the state government	46.4	43.0	5.3	0.8	4.5
RESSOUTH	(c) Conduct research that relates to the problems of the South and the nation	49.0	40.5	6.5	1.1	2.9

		VERY IMPOR-TANT	IM-POR-TANT	NOT VERY IMP.	NOT AT ALL IMP.	DK/ NA
ADULT	(d) Provide educational opportunities for the adult population of the state	47.1	47.5	4.2	0.4	0.8
ECONDEV	(e) Assist in the econimic development of the state	37.5	50.1	8.7	1.2	2.4
TRAINJOB	(f) Produce persons who are well-trained for an occupation	63.5	34.5	0.8	0.2	1.0
RESALA	(g) Conduct research that has direct reference to the State of Alabama	41.1	48.9	6.6	0.9	2.6

Q-3 Okay. Now I would like to ask you some questions about different issues facing education in Alabama. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements?

		STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DK/ NA
GOODUNIV	(a) Overall, Alabama colleges and universities are doing a good job	7.8	75.1	12.2	1.3	3.6
SUFFICNT	(b) Alabama colleges and universities use the money they receive from the state in an efficient way	2.6	54.7	23.4	2.1	17.2
COFUNDS	(c) Alabama colleges and universities should receive no increase in state funds in 1981	1.2	16.9	58.0	13.8	10.2
ACHE	(d) The Alabama Commission on Higher Education does a good job in planning for colleges and universities in this state	1.8	58.5	21.6	1.9	16.1
GOODJOB	(e) Alabama colleges and universities do a good job training students for jobs	6.3	72.1	15.1	1.0	5.5
PRIVATE	(f) State tax money should be used to support private colleges in Alabama	2.1	32.1	51.5	9.5	4.8
EARMARK	(g) Money collected from certain taxes such as some of the sales taxes should be used only for education	7.0	55.1	31.6	2.1	4.2
LOWINC	(h) Tax money should be spend to help people with low income pay the cost of attending college	8.0	63.8	22.5	2.3	3.4

		STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DK/ NA
REGENTS	(i) A Board of Regents rather than the state legislature should decide how much money each college and university in Alabama gets every year	5.7	52.1	25.6	2.9	13.8
SHIFT	(j) The Governor should have the power to shift money from one department of state government to another without the approval of the legislature	1.1	14.2	61.7	19.6	3.3
DUPLIC	(k) Alabama colleges and universities unnecessarily duplicate services	3.1	45.5	31.2	1.3	18.9
RESTCOUN	(l) Alabama colleges and universities are as good as those in the rest of the country	12.5	63.7	15.0	2.6	6.2
RESTSOUT	(m) Alabama colleges and universities are as good as those in other southern states	15.3	75.2	5.1	0.5	3.9
TOOMANY	(n) There are too many colleges and universities in Alabama	1.8	13.0	71.7	10.0	3.6
HIGHTAX	(o) I would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to improve the quality of education in Alabama colleges and universities	4.6	53.8	33.8	4.1	3.7
WITHHOLD	(p) The Governor should be able to withhold funds from a junior college which opens a branch campus that is not approved by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education	5.1	44.9	34.0	3.6	12.4
AEA	(q) The Alabama Education Association is a valuable professional group that fights for good education in Alabama	6.9	68.1	11.7	2.0	11.4

IMPCOLL Q-4 Okay. If you had children, would you say that it is very important, important, not very important or not at all important for them to attend college?

1 VERY IMPORTANT	61.6
2 IMPORTANT	32.8
3 NOT VERY IMP.	3.5
4 NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	1.1
9 DK/NA	1.0

TWOFOUR Q-5 For the first two years of college, do you think a person would get a better education in a two year junior or community college or in a four year college or university?

1	TWO YEAR COLLEGE	31.3
2	FOUR YEAR COLLEGE	48.9
3	DOESN"T MATTER	5.5
4	DEPENDS	8.2
9	DK/NA	6.1

CTUEDUC Q-6 If next year the State of Alabama decides to reduce the amount of money it spends do you think that the cuts should come in the area of education or in other state services?

1	EDUCATION	4.3	
2	OTHER STATE SERVICES	83.2	Skip to Q-9
3	EDUCATION PLUS OTHER SERVICES	2.5	
4	OTHER	0.4	
9	DK/NA	9.6	

ALLAREA Q-7 If 1, 3, or 4 to Q-6, do you think that the cuts should come from all levels of education equally, or should some levels of education such as primary schools or colleges be cut more than others?

1	ALL EQUALLY	3.1	Skip to Q-9
2	SOME LEVELS MORE THAN OTHERS	3.8	
3	OTHER	0.0	
9	DK/NA	0.3	

Q-8 If 2, 3, or 9 to Q-7, I will read a list of types of education to you. Will you please tell me for each one whether you think the State should reduce its funding a lot, only a little, or not at all?

		A LOT	LITTLE	NOT AT ALL	DK/NA
ELEMENT	(a) elementary schools	0.8	0.7	3.0	
SECOND	(b) secondary schools	0.6	0.7	2.9	
JUNIOR	(c) junior and community colleges	1.1	1.9	1.3	
FOURYEAR	(d) 4 year colleges and universities	0.7	2.0	1.7	

Q-9 If you had a child entering college next year who could satisfy all admission requirements, which college or university in Alabama would you prefer that your child enter? (The institution was identified by the respondent).

	Frequency	Percent
Alexander City State Junior College	4	1
John C. Calhoun State Community College	4	1
Gadsden State Junior College	3	0
Patrick Henry State Junior College	1	0
Jefferson State Junior College	1	0
Northeast Alabama State Junior College	1	0
Snead State Junior College	1	0
George C. Wallace State Community College	1	0
Selma University	1	0
Walker College	2	0
Alabama State University	24	4
Auburn University	136	23
Auburn University at Montgomery	4	1
Jacksonville State University	9	1
Livingston University	1	0
Troy State University	3	0
Troy State University at F. Rucker	1	0
Troy State University in Montgomery	4	1
University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa)	219	36
University of Alabama in Birmingham	41	7
University of Alabama in Huntsville	22	4
University of Montevallo	13	2
University of South Alabama	42	7
Birmingham-Southern College	14	2
Huntingdon College	3	0
Miles College	1	0
Mobile College	1	0
Oakwood College	3	0
Samford University	7	1
Spring Hill College	1	0
Tuskegee Institute	5	1
Patterson State Technical College	2	0
Northwest State Technical College	4	1
Walker State Technical College	2	0
Wallace State Community College (Hanceville)	1	0
No Response	15	3

Q-10 Why would you prefer that one?

Nearby, proximity	23
Best known	9
Large size	1
Small size	1
Highest academic quality	31
Parent or relative attended that college	18
More activity, more going on	1
Football team or other varsity sport	2
Cost of tuition	2
Personal preference	6
Best Christian college	1
Job opportunities better if graduate	1
Reputation	2
Other	2

Now, for statistical purposes, I would like to ask a few questions about you.

PRIMSOUR Q-11 Where do you get most of your information about colleges and universities in Alabama--from newspapers, television, radio, magazines, or from friends and acquaintances (more than one source - probe)

1 NEWSPAPERS	30.6
2 TELEVISION	19.0
3 RADIO	0.8
4 MAGAZINES	3.8
5 FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES	30.7
6 OTHER	5.0
7 DK/NA	10.2

OCCUP Q-12 What is the occupation of the head of your household?

Professional	20.7
Manager	17.9
Sales	7.0
Clerical	4.8
Craftsman	16.6
Operative	7.8
Laborer	8.5
Service	9.3
Other	5.7
DK	1.8

EDUC Q-13 What was the highest grade or year of school you completed?

1 0-9 GRADES	7.3
2 9-11 GRADES	18.2
3 COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL	31.4
4 BUSINESS/TECHNICAL SCHOOL	3.6
5 SOME COLLEGE	18.4
6 COMPLETED COLLEGE	13.6
7 GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL	6.8
8 DK/NA	0.8

AGE Q-14 What was your age on your last birthday?

18-30	29.1
31-40	28.1
41-50	11.9
51-60	13.4
61-70	9.1
71-98	7.8
DK/NA	0.6

INCOME Q-15 I am going to read several income categories to you. Please stop me when I get to the category including your family's total income last year -- (before taxes).

1 LESS THAN $7,500	17.0
2 $7,500 - $15,000	23.9
3 $15,000 - $22,000	22.4
4 $22,500 - $32,500	15.3
5 OVER $32,500	13.3
7 REFUSE	2.5
9 DK/NA	5.6

RACE Q-16 And, finally, could you tell me if you are:

1 WHITE	78.5
2 BLACK	16.2
3 OTHER	4.7
8 REFUSE	0.6

SEX	Respondent's Sex:	1 MALE	37.9
		2 FEMALE	61.1
		3 NA	1.1
SIZE		Less than 2,500	15.8
		2,500-9,999	23.2
		10,000-49,999	27.3
		Over 50,000	33.8

ALABAMA CITIZENS SURVEY '81

Perspectives on Postsecondary Education

by Thomas Diener
and Thomas G. Owings

INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
RESEARCH AND SERVICES

The Citizens' Viewpoint: Higher Education in Alabama 1981

Legislators, educators, and other state leaders all too often must make critical decisions concerning education issues in the absence of current and representative public views. This survey represents the third opinion inquiry conducted by the Institute of Higher Education Research and Services (IHERS) within the past five years. It provides decision-makers with up to date attitudes and opinions about higher education in Alabama.

Purpose

This study was conducted to survey a representative sample of Alabamians (age 18 and older) to determine their perceptions of higher education. It was designed to evaluate public opinions and attitudes about several areas of higher education, including teaching, research, service, finance, governance, and quality of performance.

Survey Procedure

The opinion survey was conducted on behalf of the Institute by the Capstone Poll, a telephone survey facility under the direction of the Center for Administrative and Policy Studies and the School of Communication at The University of Alabama. The Capstone Poll employed precise mathematical procedures to insure that the information obtained from their telephone sampling techniques could be generalized to the total population of the state.

For this survey, a total of 736 households were contacted by telephone for interview. Appropriate sampling techniques were employed within households to assure a random, and, indeed, representative sample of adult Alabamians. Of the total households contacted, 168 individuals declined to be interviewed and an additional 22 persons did not complete the telephone survey, yielding a total of 546 completed interviews. Data analysis was based on this number. The 546 completed interviews resulted in a 74% response rate of eligible respondents. The poll was conducted December 10-19, 1980.

Sample Representativeness

In comparing the characteristics of the survey group as a whole with the general characteristics of the state population, there appeared to be slight underrepresentation of blacks, individuals in high income brackets, persons with low educational achievement, rural residents, and males. However, these differences did not affect the results materially, and, in most cases, were within sampling variation.

Summary of Findings

The majority of Alabamians expressed opinions on almost all questions. The overall response was such that the information obtained from this survey reflects a valid cross-section of Alabama citizens and their attitudes toward higher education.

Confidence in Higher Education

. . . 94% express confidence in Alabama colleges and universities;
. . . 83% think overall that Alabama colleges and universities are doing a good job;
. . . 76% indicate that Alabama colleges and universities are as good as those in the rest of the nation; and
. . . 91% feel that Alabama colleges and universities are as good as those in other Southern states.

Value of Postsecondary Education

. . . 94% indicate that a college education is important for their children;
. . . 49% favor a four-year college or university over a two-year junior or community college to obtain a better education in the first two years of college;
. . . 78% believe that colleges are doing a good job training students for jobs;
. . . 82% do *not* think there are too many colleges and universities in Alabama; and
. . . 49% feel that Alabama colleges and universities unnecessarily duplicate services.

A Public Asset

. . . 96% believe that it is important for colleges and universities in Alabama to produce well-trained scholars;

. . . 89% feel that it is important for Alabama's colleges and universities to provide direct technical assistance to the local community and the state government;

. . . 90% agree that it is important for Alabama's colleges and universities to conduct research that relates to the problems of the South and the nation;

. . . 95% believe that it is important for the colleges and universities of Alabama to provide educational opportunities for the adult population of the state;

. . . 88% feel that it is important for Alabama's colleges and universities to assist in the economic development of the state;

. . . 98% think that it is important for Alabama's colleges and universities to produce persons who are well trained for an occupation; and

. . . 90% believe that it is important for Alabama's colleges and universities to conduct research that has direct reference to the State of Alabama.

Support for Colleges . . . and Students

. . . 58% indicate they would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to improve the quality of education in Alabama colleges and universities;

. . . 62% favor earmarking revenue received from certain taxes only for education; and

. . . 72% believe tax money should be spent to help people with low incomes pay the cost of attending college.

Money

. . . 57% think Alabama colleges and universities use the money they receive from the state in an efficient way;

. . . 72% *oppose* no increase in funding for Alabama colleges and universities in 1981;

. . . 61% oppose using state tax money to support private colleges in Alabama;

. . . 81% do not think the Governor should have the power to shift money from one department of state government to another without the approval of the legislature;
. . . 50% believe that the Governor should be able to withhold funds from a junior college which opens a branch campus that is not approved by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education; and
. . . 83% indicate that if, in 1981, the State of Alabama had to reduce the amount of money it spends, these cuts should come from state services other than education.

Governance
. . . 60% believe that the Alabama Commission on Higher Education does a good job in planning for colleges and universities in this state; and
. . . 58% feel that a Board of Regents rather than the state legislature should decide how much money each college and university in Alabama gets every year.

Information
. . . 31% indicate that they received information about colleges and universities most frequently from friends and acquaintances;
. . . 31% indicate that they received information about colleges and universities most frequently from newspapers; and
. . . 19% indicate that they received information about colleges and universities most frequently from television.

Summary

This latest opinion poll conducted by IHERS found and reaffirmed that Alabamians are positive, proud, and supportive and have high confidence in their colleges and universities. They are willing to support higher education financially. They believe funds earmarked for education should stay that way. They indicate that colleges and universities are doing a good job in training students for jobs and assisting in the educational and economic growth and development of Alabama.

Institute of Higher Education Research and Services

The Institute of Higher Education Research and Services (IHERS) is a nationally recognized research and service agency of The University of Alabama. Able to draw upon its own resources and those of a large and complex university, the Institute also uses federal, state, and private resources in the development of postsecondary education in Alabama and the South.

Thomas Diener, Ph.D.

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About the Authors

Thomas Diener, Ph.D., is Director of the Institute of Higher Education Research and Services, a member of the Graduate Faculty, and Adjunct Professor of Higher Education at The University of Alabama. He is a specialist in cooperative arrangements, faculty and administrator professional development programs, and research in postsecondary education. He is also the author of many articles and monographs in a variety of areas of postsecondary education.

Thomas G. Owings, Ph.D., is an Associate in the Institute of Higher Education Research and Services at The University of Alabama. He is a specialist in planning, community and educational needs assessments, community and junior colleges, survey and sampling procedures, questionnaire design and development, and evaluation of educational programs. He has written articles, monographs, and papers in the areas of economic impact, educational needs assessment, survey and questionnaire design, and has conducted two previous opinion polls on higher education in Alabama.